

RIOT ACTS:
FLAUNTING GENDER DEVIANCE IN MUSIC PERFORMANCE

A documentary by Madsen Minax

72 Minutes
Video, Color, USA, 2009



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Festival Screenings

Awards

Jury Award: Best Documentary Feature

Reeling Lesbian & Gay International Film Festival

Audience Choice Award: Best Documentary Feature

Reeling Lesbian & Gay International Film Festival

Audience Award

Park City Music and Film Festival
Park City, Utah

Philadelphia Independent Film

Frameline: San Francisco's International LGBT Film Festival

London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival

Out On Screen Vancouver Queer Film Festival

Reeling Gay and Lesbian Film Festival

Chicago International Movies and Music Festival

SENE Film, Music & Arts Festival

Boston LGBT Film Festival

BostonIdapalooza Music Festival

Seattle Transgender Film Festival

MIX Mexico LGBT Film Festival

Sacramento Film and Music Festival International Youth Film Festival

Queer Lisboa Film Festival

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Short Synopsis

Riot Acts is a 'trans-fabulous' rockumentary representing the multi-dimensional lives of transgender and gender variant musicians. A first-hand perspective of the intersections between gender performance and stage performance, Riot Acts suggests that identities and bodies are undeniably political, and the journey within a trans experience isn't always one of tragedy, but one of creativity and joy.

Long synopsis

Representing the whole lives of transgender and gender variant musicians, each story is one of a journey in progress through a first-hand perspective of the intersections between gender performance and stage performance. The feature documentary Riot Acts: Flaunting Gender Deviance in Music Performance will allow a venue for a particular niche of trans existence to be revealed and celebrated.

The individuals and bands featured in Riot Acts are celebrated as talented, inspiring, sexy, critical and fully three-dimensional in a manner that purposefully counters the vision of isolation and destitution frequently portrayed in mainstream media. As transpeople ourselves, the producers seek to capture trans and gender variant identities as complexly as they are embodied and performed, both on and off the stage.

Discussion highlights include songwriting, voice presentation, coping with voice changes, passing/not passing, presenting a body/bodies on stage, audiences, venues, the idea of the spectacle, societal and media representation, performing gender and notions about "drag," and the personal as political, culminating with the notion that the trans experience isn't always one of tragedy.

Whether a personal journey, a political journey, or a literal journey, the aspect of travel, through years or miles, is a binding stylistic element throughout Riot Acts. In-depth interviews are spliced carefully abed travel and performance imagery, while sequences are juxtaposed visually by the mergers of 16mm film, super 8 film, video and still photography. Furthermore, experimental uses of audio and sound as well as the complexity of the original music of the interviewees themselves, forms a truly mixed media documentary. As trans people, our bodies are nontraditional and our ideas about culture and identity are non traditional. Why shouldn't our way of making art be non-traditional as well?

Featured interviewees include Anderson Toone, Lipstick Conspiracy, Katastrophe and Trannysaurus Sex (San Francisco), Basic Fix (Portland), Ryder Richardson (Seattle), Tough Tough Skin, and Venus DeMars (Minneapolis), Adhamh Roland (St. Louis), Ryka Aoki De La Cruz (Los Angeles), Jessica Xavier (Washington, DC), The Shondes and Novice Theory (Brooklyn, NY), The Degenerettes (Baltimore), Systyr Act (Boston), The Kliks (Toronto, ON), and Coyote Grace (Sonoma County, CA).

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PRODUCTION CREDITS

Director: Madsen Minax

Executive Production: Actor Slash Model

Producer: Simon Strikeback & Madsen Minax

Cinematography: Malic Amalya

Edited: Madsen Minax

Production Assistants : Nern Ostendorf, Jules Roskam, Sam Feder, Sea Oliver, Lex Sloan, Stephanie “Syd” Yang, Neo Collett, Martin Krump,

Music: Lipstick Conspiracy, Ryka Aoki, Katastrophe, Trannysaurus Sex, Novice Theory, The Cliks, Systyr Act, The Degenerettes, Adhamh Roland, Jessica Xavier, The Shondes, Ryder Richardson, The Bloods, Coyote Grace, Basic Fix, Venus DeMars

Audio Post Production: Experimental Sound Studio, Chicago, IL 

Riot ActsFeaturing: Adhamh Roland, Ryka Aoki De La Cruz, Sarafina Maraschino, Shawna Love, Marilyn Mitchell, Kitty Shockey, Maren Abromowitz, Anita “Durt” O’Shea, Rocco Kayiatos, Kelly Moe, Maile Thiesen, Ryder Richardson, Venus DeMars, Radford Bishop, Zach McNulty, River Gordon, Lucus Silveira, Jen Bento, Morgan Doctor, Nina Martinez, Joe Stevens, Ingrid Elizabeth, Jessica Xavier, Louisa Solomon, Temim Fruchter, Elijah Oberman, Ian Brannigan, Geo Wyeth, Travis Clough, Tam Willey, Greg Sensing, Rahne Alexander, Kristen Anchor, Crissy Howland

Guest Appearances by Our Lady J Lauren Steely, Dave End, Solomon Green, Andrea Mize, Jenny Urban, Boi Bella, Fanny Smack, Sarah Adorable



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Select Featured Performer Bios

Adhamh Roland (riotfolk.org)

Adhamh Roland is a guitar strummin', accordion squeezing, whistling warbler who fancies reminiscing about his midwestern roots while devising collective strategies for liberation. Adhamh has coughed up 4 solo albums in the last several years and is collaborating with musicians in his new home of Berkeley, California to form a new music project that has yet to be named. Adhamh is a founding member of the Riot Folk Collective (www.riotfolk.org), and has toured and created with Benchpress Burlesque (St. Louis' radical multi-gendered, sex-positive, queer-positive, feminist feast of political performance art), The Tranny Roadshow (www.trannyroadshow.com), as well as many bicycle powered tours totaling over 3,500 miles of pedal-powered folk shows. When he's not behind an instrument, Adhamh is a medic at the Berkeley Free Clinic and a student of Community Health in the San Francisco Bay Area. With a sharp analysis and a tenacity toward metaphor, Adhamh's style has been described as political, rich, sophisticated, playful and sexy...all at the same time.

The Cliks (theclicks.com)

Gutsy, melodic, dramatic, and dark, Toronto's the Cliks arrived on the scene in 2007 with two strong bullet points. First, they covered Justin Timberlake's hit "Cry Me a River" in a White Stripes meets the Pretenders style, and second, leader Lucas Silveira was a transgendered FTM (female-to-male) leading an all-female, androgynous band. Initial word of mouth started in 2006 and had little to do with Silveira's gender-bending. Instead, it was their blistering live shows around Toronto that earned attention and had the Canadian press comparing the band to Joan Jett, Jon Spencer, and Ziggy Stardust-era David Bowie.

Coyote Grace (coyotegrace.com)

If you want a lesson in organic chemistry, take notes and watch the sparks fly between the acoustic down-home duo known as COYOTE GRACE. This old-timey salt & pepper shaker pair is comprised of Joe Stevens, a transman singer/songwriter from Northern California, backed up by Ingrid Elizabeth on vocals and upright bass, a sassy femme originally hailing from the hills of Southeastern Ohio. The two met while living in Seattle, and have been performing as a duo since December 2004, sharing the stage with bluegrass, old-time, folk rock, jazz, and cabarets alike.

The Degenerettes (degenerettes.com)

The Degenerettes are Baltimore's all-grrrrl underground garage rock trio. These gals have been stomping the East Coast with queered raw primitive rock & roll since 2005 and now they're coming for you! Rahne Alexander (guitar, vocals) is the primary songwriter for the Degenerettes.

In 2005, she recorded and released her debut solo CD, "Blonde On A Bum Trip.". She contributes frequently to Baltimore City Paper, Baltimore Gay Life, and other other publications. She has toured with the Tranny Road Show, Connie and Bonnie Show, and has played solo gigs all over the country.

Kristen Anchor (drums) is a media artist whose work has screened in film festivals across the country. Kristen books films and shows at the Creative Alliance (Baltimore). She is also a founding member of Charm City Kitty Club, a long-running Baltimore-based cabaret showcasing queer performance.

Jessica Xavier

In addition to her extensive advocacy efforts for sexual minorities, Jessica Xavier is a singer-songwriter and veteran musician, having played with many Washington DC area bands, including The Cherrys, Me Neither and most recently, Femme Messiah. She sings and plays bass, piano and keyboards, and composes her songs on a computer music sequencer, a "food-processor for music". Openly transsexual since transitioning in 1991, her songs reflect her transgendered experience. Jessica's first CD, entitled *Changeling*, was released in 1999 by Gallae Records and featured her song *Stonewall*, which commemorates the prominent roles of Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson in the birth of gay liberation. In 2005 Gallae Records released the *Femme Messiah* CD, *Orchids In The Arctic*, featuring the song *Gender*.

Katastrophe (myspace.com/katastropherap)

Katastrophe (aka Rocco Kayiatos) is a San Francisco based rapper and producer. He uses his poetic grasp of language to weave dense tales of lives lived outside the mainstreams of education, class, and culture. He makes hip-hop that explodes with dangerous and ebullient passion. He was crowned Producer of the Year by Out Music Awards for his debut album "Let's Fuck, Then Talk About My Problems." Kayiatos has since released a second album entitled "Fault, Lies and Faultlines" and third, "The Worst Amazing." He has toured the US and Europe several times and continues to travel to support his releases and has been featured in the documentary films *Poetic License*, *Pick up the Mic* and *Riot Acts*. His music has helped soundtrack Showtime's *The L Word*, as well as several short films.

Lipstick Conspiracy (lipstickconspiracy.com)

This multi-influenced power-pop band is no stranger to great press! Recently christened *Pride in the Arts Favorite Group* by the Stonewall Society, and featured in *Guitar Player* and *CURVE* magazine, Lipstick Conspiracy was hailed as "The Fabulous 5" by the *East Bay Express*, cited in the *San Francisco Bay Guardian's* 'Best of the Bay' issue as *BEST GIRL BAND 2004*, and proclaimed as a *Buzzworthy* artist on *PlanetOut*. Their debut CD, "Don't Tell A Soul", has garnered steady air-play on national mainstream and college radio stations, various Internet radio programs, and international stations from Canada and Mexico, to Belgium, Italy, Serbia, Sweden, and New Zealand.

Novice Theory (novicetheory.com)

NOVICE THEORY is New York based multi instrumentalist, songwriter, and performer Geo Wyeth. Wyeth's pianistic stylings, electric voice, and innovative song stories have been wowing audiences at such prominent New York venues as Joe's Pub, The Zipper Factory, Ars Nova, and PS 122. His performances have been featured in *The Village Voice*, *NEXT Magazine*, and the *New Yorker*, as well as various independent music blogs. With roots in Earl Dax's Weimar New York Cabaret, as well as street performance, folk music, and Hip Hop, Novice Theory is a truly hybrid artist. Witness his lyrically dense songs, which feature narratives of incongruous family relationships, transgender exile, New York City, and racial passing by attending a show or listening to his self-released debut album "At The End We Listen".

Ryka Aoki (rykaryka.com)

Ryka Aoki de la Cruz is a writer, composer, chemist, black belt, and moonshiner who has recently featured at the National Queer Arts Festival, the National Gay and Lesbian Theatre Festival, Ladyfest South 2007, Atlanta Pride, UCLA's OutCRY, and Fresh Meat. In 2005, Ryka was the inaugural performer for San Francisco Pride's first ever Transgender Stage. She has also worked with the American Association of Hiroshima-Nagasaki A-Bomb Survivors, and two of her compositions have been adopted by the group as its official "Songs of Peace." Ryka has been honored by the California State Senate for her work with Trans/Giving, LA's only art/performance series dedicated to trans, genderqueer, and intersex artists. She was formerly head judo coach at UCLA and Cornell University, and is a professor of English at Santa Monica College.

The Shondes (myspace.com/theshondes)

The Shondes (taking their name from the Yiddish word for "shame" or "disgrace") are a band from Brooklyn, NY whose dramatic brand of rock music has been compared to Sleater-Kinney, Patti Smith and The Raincoats. The Shondes are known for their melodic rock sound and a live show that explodes with energy. Their music draws from feminist punk, classical and Jewish music, which combine to create songs that are often both heartbreaking and hopeful. They bring an infectious urgency to their live performances that gets audiences on their feet .



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Filmmaker's Biographies



Madsen Minax: Director/Editor/Producer

Madsen Minax is a filmmaker, musician and multi-media artist come hell-raiser currently living and working in Chicago, IL. After studying quartet composition in Utrecht, The Netherlands, tattoo apprenticing in San Francisco, and earning his BFA in film and sound at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, he survives in the real world/supplements his filmmaking, songwriting obsessions by editing educational films, serving coffee drinks and giving mediocre tattoos out of his basement.

Madsen is an enthusiast of destroying and rebuilding boundaries. He co-curates a quarterly screening series called Threat Level Queer Shorts, recently starred in and co-directed the Chicago based hit homo short, *Queer Teen Romance* (2009), as well as the experimental animation *Their Body Is...* (2005), and consistently tours with the performance duet *Actor Slash Model* (2006-present) and the

band *The Homoticons* (2009-present) Madsen will be entering the Graduate Department of Art Theory and Practice at Northwestern University in the fall of 2010.



Simon Strikeback: Producer

Simon Strikeback is an activist and educator focusing on queerness, gender studies and performance, and has been an organizer of various campaigns and gatherings, primarily related to queer and transgender issues for the past ten years. While pursuing a women's studies degree at DePaul University, Simon became interested in justice organizing around workers' rights and queer visibility projects. From 1999-2005, he was a lead organizer with *Camp Trans*, a protest and community space fighting for the inclusion of transwomen at the annual *Michigan Womyn's Music Festival*. In this vein, he has given presentations at numerous universities throughout the US, addressing ideas of feminism as it relates to transgender issues.

Simon was born into a family of musicians and was trained from an early age. After playing in many groups throughout the years, it was while living at a queer arts commune in rural Tennessee that he began to play the ukulele and sing, while developing an appreciate for traditional bluegrass music. This led to Simon's involvement in the music performance project, *Actor Slash Model*.

He recently completed a Masters Degree in Interdisciplinary Humanities at the University of Chicago, and is also the editor of the self-produced zine *Bound To Struggle: Where Kink and Radical Politics Meet*.



Malic Amalya: Cinematographer

Malic Amalya started making videos at a cable access television station in 1995. In 2006 he shot his first roll of 16mm film and was instantly seduced by the photographic process of the medium.

Blending experimental and narrative styles, Amalya investigates the implications of consistencies and disparities in communication. Deploying repetition, utilizing the materiality of film, and contrasting opposing signifiers, his work breaks down what is often considered normal or inherent. His films and videos capture shifts in memory, identification and relationship dynamics, and seek to disrupt the audience's experience of perception.

Amalya is currently in post-production on "Boots For Tula." The film is adapted from Rhiannon Argo's short story that was published in Michelle Tea's anthology "Baby, Remember My Name." He is also the cinematographer for Actor Slash Model's documentary "Me Neither," which explores trans and gender variant identity in music.

Amalya holds an MFA in Moving Image from the University of Illinois at Chicago and a BA from Hampshire College. His experimental films have screened throughout North America, including the TIE Cinema Exposition in Montreal, the Olympia Film Festival in Washington state, the Three Minute Film Festival in Santa Fe, NM, the Around the Coyote Gallery in Chicago, and at Yale University in New Haven, CT.



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PRESS

“Riot Acts’ enthusiasm is infectious!” **Jason Barker, London Lesbian & Gay Film Festival**

“What director Madsen Minax doesn't do is label the performers. *Riot Acts* spotlights and identifies the names of a wealth of artists... but the movie never tries to shoehorn them into the biology-is-destiny square pegs of mainstream mediaspeak... Riot Acts is one of those few documentaries that succeeds because of what it chooses not to tell you...” **Baltimore City Paper**

“(Riot Acts) discusses the realities of being a trans musician with the kind of candidness that only a “by us for us” project allows...” **Baltimore Radar**

The Huffington Post

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/03/08/riot-acts-film-explores-t_n_490244.html

The Chicago Reader

<http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/riot-acts-cimmfest-transgender-musicians-documentary/Content?oid=1492119>

Edge Chicago

<http://www.edgechicago.com/index.php?ch=entertainment&sc=movies&sc2=news&sc3=&id=103092>

Baltimore City Paper

<http://www.citypaper.com/film/review.asp?rid=15531>

Time Out Chicago

<http://chicago.timeout.com/articles/film/80288/reeling-film-festival>

The Chicago Free Press

<http://dev.chicagofreepress.com/2010/03/03/reel-advice-movie-reviews/>

Logo Online

<http://www.afterellen.com/blog/jensabella/new-documentary-about-trans-musicians-features-queer-bands-to-watch>



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Cinema

Reel Advice: Trans musicians and Tennessee Williams

By Gregg Shapiro

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Limited runs:

"Riot Acts: Flaunting Gender Variance in Music Performance" (Actor Slash Model Productions): Its academic-sounding subtitle aside, "Riot Acts" is a thought-provoking, insightful and informative doc that marks the impressive debut of a promising young filmmaker. Director Madsen Minax, a gender-variant musician and one half of the band Actor Slash Model, knows the material intimately. That first-hand experience enables Minax to make the subject matter so accessible to viewers. Minax assembled a top-notch array of interview subjects, including members of the bands Coyote Grace, The Shondes, Lipstick Conspiracy, The Kliks, The Degenerettes, Trannysaurus Sex and Systyr Act, to name a few. The doc touches on a broad array of topics, ranging from the concept of trans musicians making music for trans people, to dealing with audience and public perception, to performing for audiences beyond the queer community, to dealing with the media and the press. It was fascinating to hear the performers speaking about transitioning their art along with physical appearance and the difference between being comfortable on stage versus being comfortable on the street, and concerns such as the issue of taking testosterone and the effect that it has on the voice. Minax also makes excellent use of performance footage.

Screening for free on Jan. 7 at 7 p.m. at Louis Hall, 633 Clark Street, room 119, on the Northwestern University campus in Evanston.

In theaters:

ties, "Broken Embraces" specializes in being a movie about secrets and lies and never breaks our interest in Almodovar's multi-layered storytelling abilities.

"Crazy Heart" (Fox Searchlight): A honky-tonk version of "The Wrestler," writer/director Scott Cooper's feature-film debut features a stellar performance by lead actor Jeff Bridges. Hard living has taken its toll on 57-year-old country/western singer Bad Blake (Bridges), who appears to be a cross between Waylon Jennings and Kris Kristofferson. He's been reduced to playing in bowling alleys where, because of his reputation, he's not allowed to run a bar tab. But, heck, he can bowl all he wants. Bridges is at his best here, and deserves the raves he's been getting.

"The Loss of a Teardrop Diamond" (Constellation): An only child and heiress of two fortunes, Fisher Willow (Bryce Dallas Howard) is a Jazz Age goddess, out of place in her Memphis homeland. Under the watchful, but fading, eye of her Aunt Cornelia (Ann-Margret), she has returned home from her studies at the Sorbonne on the heels of a tragic accident perpetrated by her father on a Mississippi River levee.

"The Loss of a Teardrop Diamond" couldn't possibly have been written by anyone else but Tennessee Williams. From the Southern setting and sensibility to the hint of homoeroticism to the flawed but powerful female lead character, "Teardrop Diamond" is more rhinestone than real thing. And even though she's not Vivien Leigh or Elizabeth Taylor, Howard does what she can here to make Fisher Willow deserve her place among Williams' women.